

# Cuisine of Thailand



Thai cuisine is known for its balance of five fundamental flavors in each dish or the overall meal, hot (spicy), sour, sweet, salty and bitter. One of the important ingredients is *nam pla* (a very aromatic and strong tasting fish sauce). Typically a full meal consists of many complementary dishes served concurrently instead of a single main course with side dishes.

Rice is a staple component of Thai cuisine, as it is of most Asian cuisines. The highly-prized, sweet-smelling jasmine rice is indigenous to Thailand. Rice dishes are accompanied by highly aromatic curries, stir-fries and other dishes, incorporating sometimes large quantities of chilies, lime juice and lemon grass. Noodles are popular as well. Noodles usually come as a single dish, like *Pad Thai*.

Although popularly considered as a single cuisine, Thai food is really more accurately described as four regional cuisines corresponding to the four main regions of the country: Northern, Northeastern, Central and Southern. Each region has its own distinct dialect, history, culture, climate and cuisine. The North, for example, has a relatively slower, softer-spoken dialect and was once its own kingdom known as Lanna.

Many Thai dishes in the Central and Southern regions use a wide variety of leaves rarely found in the west, such as *kaffir lime leaves*. Usually fresh - *kaffir lime leaves* characteristic flavor appears in nearly every Thai soup (e.g., the hot and sour *Tom Yam*), stir-fry or curry from those areas. It is frequently combined with garlic, *galangal*, ginger and/or fingerroot, together with liberal amounts of chilies, blended together to make curry paste. Fresh Thai basil is needed for the authentic fragrance of certain dishes such as Green curry. Other typical ingredients include the small green Thai eggplants, tamarind, palm and coconut sugars, and coconut milk.

With the exception of noodle soups, Thai food is generally eaten with a fork and a spoon, rather than with chopsticks. The fork, held in the left hand, is used to shovel food into the spoon. However, it is often common practice for Thais and hill tribe peoples in the North and Northeast to eat sticky rice with their hands by making it into balls that are dipped into side dishes and eaten. Also, in the Southernmost provinces of the country Thai-Muslims can be seen to eat meals with only their right hand as some Muslims in Malaysia do.

## Famous Thai dishes familiar in the west from Central Thailand include:

Tom Yam goong - hot & sour soup with shrimp

Tom Yam Gai - hot & sour soup with chicken

Tom Kha Gai - hot sweet soup with chicken and coconut

Satay - grilled meat served with peanut sauce (originally from Indonesia)

Pad Thai - rice noodles pan fried with fish sauce, sugar, lime juice or tamarind pulp and egg combined with chicken, seafood, and tofu.

Red curry (*Gaeng Pet* "hot curry") - made with dried red chilies

Gai yang - marinated and grilled chicken

Green curry (*Gaeng khiew-waan*) - sweet green curry, made with fresh green chilies and flavored with cumin  
Yellow (*Massaman*) curry  
Neua pad prik - Thai chili beef or Thai pepper beef  
Panang beef - dry beef curry  
Panang Chicken  
Panang Pork

### **A few Northeastern Thai dishes popular throughout the country:**

Larb - various sour salads containing meat  
Som tam - grated papaya salad, pounded with a mortar and pestle  
Sticky rice

Throughout the country there are many interpretations and variations on these common dishes. Other dishes from the northern part of Thailand include unique sauces, such as *nam prik num*, and exotic foods, such as raw beef, fermented fish paste, and deep fried larvae (also enjoyed in the Northeast). The culinary creativity even extends to *naming*: one tasty larva translates as "freight train" and the smallest, hottest chilies are known as *Prik Kii Nuu* "mouse droppings chilies".

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Source: Wikipedia  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai\\_cuisine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_cuisine)*

